

Rep. Dawn Morrell

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2006 Final Report

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Concerned about long-term care?
We're listening!

Meet with Washington's
Long-Term Care Task Force
<http://www.governor.wa.gov/ltctf/>

May 31, 2006, 1 to 4 p.m.

Puyallup Senior Center
601 N. Meridian

Representative Dawn Morrell
25th Legislative District



Rep. Morrell with pages Beth Bollinger and Olivia Anderson from Cascade Christian High School

Committees:

Co-Chair, Joint Committee on Veterans & Military Affairs
Vice-Chair, Health Care
Economic Development, Agriculture & Trade
Capital Budget
Rules
Chair, Long-Term Care Financing & Chronic Care Management Task Force

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Dear Neighbors,

It's great to be home after a whirlwind legislative session that accomplished a great deal, saved more than \$940 million for future needs, and for the first time in 20 years finished a day early.

As a nurse, I'm used to hard work and long days, and that experience was very helpful in getting through this year's fast-paced session. Working all those long days and late nights was worth it — we got a lot done!

Limited space only allows me to highlight some of the session's accomplishments in this newsletter. Please feel free to get in touch with me if there are other issues you'd like to hear about. My Legislative Assistant Annie Johnson and I are back in our downtown Puyallup office, and we'd enjoy seeing you.

Since this is my final report on the 2006 Session, let me take this opportunity to thank everyone for the honor and pleasure of being your representative. Serving you and being a voice for you is the reason I'm here, and I'll never forget that.

Warmly,

Dawn

Dawn Morrell

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Investing In Education
For Our Children's Success

The state budget crisis a few years ago hurt our schools. So it just made sense that when our economy and budget improved we would increase support for schools and students who need more help to succeed at the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL).



The past two years have been great for schools. For the first time, we fully funded the people's education initiatives (I-728, I-732) and state support grew by an average of \$1,234 per student – actually \$1,490 per student if you include new school construction funding. We even put \$275 million in a

Student Achievement Account for future education funding needs!

I'm particularly happy we listened to parents, teachers and the Superintendent of Public Instruction and created alternative paths to graduation. Plus, there is \$32 million in the state budget to help students succeed at the WASL, through summer school, early morning classes, personal tutoring or other locally designed strategies to help students reach higher standards.

I'm also excited by the new early learning initiative, which will better use state dollars so students go to kindergarten ready to learn. Add it all together and this truly was a great year for education.

Working for Senior Citizens

Fair Tax-Deferrals for Senior Citizens

I'm proud the senior property tax relief I fought for in 2004 is helping Pierce County seniors. This year, I championed the effort to make the senior citizen property tax deferral program more fair to seniors by slashing interest rates from 8% to 5%.

Improving Long-Term Care

I care deeply about high-quality long-term care that respects people's dignity. We made good progress this year, including:



- Improved funding to preserve quality nursing home care (\$10.1 million). We get double the value (\$20.2 million) for our money because of federal matching funds.
- Fair wages and benefits for home care providers.
- Ending the nursing home bed tax. This tax adds up

to over \$1,900 a year per bed and hurts many private-paying nursing home residents. The tax will end in 2007.

As the Chair of the Long-term Care Financing & Chronic Care Management Task Force, I'm very interested in hearing ideas from citizens on improving long-term care. If you have ideas, please send them to me!

Helping Our Small Businesses

Tax Relief for Small Businesses

Small businesses told me they hated the automatic five percent penalty for late payment of taxes, and that having taxes due on the 20th of the month causes headaches for cash flow and accounting. I co-sponsored a bill ending the penalty and changing tax due dates to the 25th of the month. This was a priority for businesses and amounts to about \$11 million of tax relief.

Increasing the Personal Property Tax Exemption

High overhead costs are a major challenge facing owners of new small businesses. I co-sponsored increasing their personal property tax exemption from \$3,000 to \$15,000 per year. This idea passed the Legislature and will be on the November ballot.

No More Free Tobacco Samples for Kids

Adults have a right to smoke. But tobacco companies don't have a right to market tobacco to kids by distributing free tobacco "samples" that end up in children's hands and increase smoking rates. That's why I sponsored a ban on free tobacco samples and enthusiastically supported a similar ban proposed by Republican Senator Bob Oke, who has worked on this issue for many years. I'm happy I was able to help his bill pass the House and become law.

Supporting Family Farms



If we don't help family farms survive, we'll lose part of the character – and open space – of Pierce County. We listened to farm-

ers and passed laws to help them. We granted Growth Management Act flexibility, so farmers can supplement their incomes by using part of their farm land for non-farm activities, such as a small engine-repair shop. We also ended the sales tax on farm diesel and replacement parts for farm machinery.

Two Great Compromises

Bipartisanship works! After years of political battling, all sides of two major issues united this year to address two major issues facing Washington:

- Businesses and labor unions united for Unemployment Insurance reforms making the system more fair and efficient. These efficiencies will allow better unemployment benefits for workers and lower unemployment insurance costs for businesses.
- Doctors and lawyers compromised on extensive medical malpractice reform. Although there is still more work to do on medical malpractice, everyone agreed the steps we took will boost patient safety and address medical liability costs.

A Prudent Budget

Our 2006 budget not only makes needed investments in education, health care, and other pressing priorities, it saves over \$940 million--almost two dollars for every dollar invested. These savings will help avoid budget deficits in future years.

Working for Affordable Health Care

Small Business Health Insurance Partnership Wins!

I've worked for years to help owners of small businesses who are struggling with rising health insurance costs. This year, we had our biggest victory yet when my idea for a Small Employer Health Insurance Partnership became law.

When the partnership starts next year, it will give insurance premium assistance to more small businesses offering health care to workers. A similar program is already helping small businesses in Oregon, and it will work well for Washington's businesses and workers, too. Employers like the fact that this is a strictly voluntary program – a choice, not a mandate. And there are no paperwork burdens on businesses, since employees make the application.

Saving Lives with Health Technology

Health information technology sounds boring. But computerized health records can dramatically reduce health costs and save people's lives by eliminating medical errors due to prescription mistakes, unrecognized allergies and other problems. Business groups and the federal government estimate these systems could save as much as 10% of overall health costs.

When signing my proposal for promoting this technology into law, Gov. Chris Gregoire said, "This bill is about making sure our health care system delivers the best care to patients and makes the most efficient use of scarce health care dollars." I agree.



Respecting Final Wishes

Living wills should be respected. We created a secure statewide registry of advanced health directive so that doctors and emergency rooms anywhere in Washington can quickly find living wills when they're most needed.



Health Care for Kids

The improving economy and revenue picture enabled us to expand health coverage to an additional 7,000 children this year. This is a wise investment. A year of health insurance for a child costs much less than even one average stay in the hospital for a health problem that wasn't treated in time.



Dawn's Veterans Innovation Program is signed into law by the Governor

Honoring Washington's Veterans

Many Washingtonians have answered the call to duty to defend our country and way of life in recent wars, and we have a moral duty to answer their calls for help when they return home.

I designed a new \$2 million Veterans Innovations Program to offer two kinds of crucial help: (1) The Defenders Fund to provide one-time grants of up to \$500 to help returning reservists and National Guard troops overcome challenges in employment, education, housing and health care; and (2) A grant program to help local communities tailor needed services to veterans in their home towns.

Every Republican and Democrat in the Legislature supported my call to honor veterans with better services. It was my proudest moment this year as co-chair of the Legislature's Joint Committee on Veteran and Military Affairs.



Meridian Habitat Park

South Hill is growing so fast! Families there need the open space and recreational opportunities that will become available when Pierce County buys the amphitheater property, which will be renamed Meridian Habitat Park. I'm thrilled we secured capital budget money to purchase the land, establish a community center and further enhance the future park's beautiful woods, wetlands and wildlife habitat.

This \$400,000 represented the final dollars Pierce County needed to purchase and secure over 1,200 acres of open space. My hope is that the amphitheater property will become the heart of South Hill and serve as a gathering place for our community. A community is only as strong as its heart.

Puyallup Riverwalk Trail

A big thank you to all the Puyallup boosters who helped me persuade state leaders to invest \$200,000 to link the Puyallup Riverwalk Trail with the 20-mile-long Pierce County Foothills Trail. As city officials said, connecting the trails will boost our local economy in addition to providing long-term value for everyone who enjoys the natural beauty of the great outdoors.